

THE
VVITTYJESTS

AND

Mad Pranks

OF

JOHN FRITH

Commonly called,

The Merry-Conceited-MASON,
Brother and Fellow-Traveller

WITH

Captain James Hinde
The Famous High-way-Man.

L O N D O N,

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of *London Bridge*. 1673.





And first of his Birth and Boyes Tricks,

Lieutenant John Frith, which is the
 Subject of our following Discourse,
 was bozn at Deep Dalle in Derbyshire, of
 honest parentage, his Father being a
 free Mason, and brought him up to his
 Latin, and to wytte all hands usual, in-
 tending to send him to the Antverskip, he
 was an excellent Mason; having such
 good parts he grew prond, and lighting
 into bad company, being kept short of
 money, and took wilde courses; he then
 studies how to compass money to spend,
 and chose vile company rather then the
 Antverskip or his trade; being for his
 spirit, Wits and Trade, called The Mer-
 ry conceited Mason.

How he feasted his Fellows at another time:

He and his Fellows being in an
 Inn, having been very merry, and
 their coyn growing very short, and being
 very hungry, they knew not how to get
 a dinner, but John that was quick-wit,

ted, soon contrived how to get one. In that Inn was a Wedding kept, with variety of good cheer, so soon as dinner was set on the table, one of his Complices went out into the park, let two Staff-bogs together by the ears, hollows, calls his fellows to see the sport, which stirr'd not, then run all the people out both the family and Strangers: in runs his friend, locks the dooz in merriment, keeps all out till they had din'd; then opened the dooz, permitting them to take the rest; and to make themselves more sport, in the dead of the night they took a cat, chooes her with Walnut-bells fill'd with pitch, ties a Bell about her neck, and turns her into the Bridegrooms Chamber, which made such harmony that affrighted both the Bride and Bridegroom.

How he furnished himself with moneys at a Tavern.

John being at a Fair, and in a gallant Ward, espyed some Graziers and other Countrey-men telling fifty pounds upon a table in a Tavern where they were drinking, the one party would not receive it except more were added to it, the other would

would not take it back again, saying, it was his bargain; whilst they were thus contending, in steps Frith, strikes the moneys suddenly, being most of it gold, into his hat, runs out at the door, draws his sword, betakes him to his heels cries An Arrest, An Arrest, runs to his horse, mounts and out-rides them all, thus bought he fifty pounds at a fair.

An Excellent Prank performed by *Frith*
amongst four Bears.

There was a Bearward that kept four lusty Bears, with whom he travelled the Countrey, and coming where Frith at that time lay with his Complices to catch a Purse-bale. It being fair-time, the Bears were tied in a great barn on the out-side of the town, close to an house that sold Ale; they to make themselves sport with two marrow-bones with honey, casts them between two and two, sets them all to fighting, and then whipt them, having first plac'd themselves upon a beam; but in conclusion the bears brake loose, and made at their new game, the Whippers take their heels, and

14)
sleaped very narrowly with their lives,
the Bears brake into the Alehouse, pul-
led down the drink, pull'd out the taps;
eat up all the raw meat, brake down an
Oven, pull'd out the bread: All this
while the Bearwarden here drunk, and
knew nothing, but missing the Bears in
the Morning, found them as drunk as
they themselves were over-night, and was
forc'd to pay for the loss the house su-
stainer.

How he served one *Anthony Topley* which
led a Bear about the Countrey.

Our Anthony Topley that lived once
at Bisley, having a small parcel of
Land left him by his Father, sold the
same, and bought with that moneys a
great Bear, and a Bear-dog, and hired a
man to travel with him; one time, lodg-
ing by a Market-town in the night, his
bear brake into the Ale-Cellar, and drank
as long as he could find the way up into
a Chamber or loft finds a bed, lies down
upon it, and falls asleep; it hapned that a
man and two women lay in that bed; they
wak'd, feeling so heavy a weight upon
their feet, and having such strong pussions,
put forth their hands to feel what it was,

and

and by the noise, boylent and roughness,
their actions being debauched, concluded
it to be the deuil, and so being all three
stark naked, bestrid a great beam of Tre-
der that went cross the house; and thus
being fasten, cried out in a most horrible
manner The devil, the devil, the devil,
help Neighbors, good Neighbors help;
John that was so pricked to let the bear
loose, byng in the Watch, where they
found the bear drunk, and the three in the
posture before rehearsed: all three was
sent to Bridewel to beat hemp.

How he found the aforesaid Topley with his
Bear.

FRich. as is before rehearsed, being
taxed for letting the bear loose, sought
revenge on Topley, and so dissembled the
matter, that he procured assistance to him,
and travelling from Stableforth to Nor-
tingham in hot weather, between Bram-
cote and Hemlock-hills, his bear being
lazy, went into a Pond, and was hard
to be gotten forth again: John with his
three Gentlemen, riding softly after, found
the bear laid down at the end of the sal-
low lanes, where the husbandmen were

plowing, perswades him to have him
 drawn by horses, immediately appear a
 kennel of hounds hunting the bear on
 Bramcote-hills with open cry: Anthony
 fearing his bear would be torn in pieces
 by the hounds, gave a Whilling to the
 Plough-men, they clapt on their Plough-
 chains on the bears collar, lashed their
 horses, John and his men belloiw, the
 bear roars and foams, the horses bear-
 ing so hideous a noth, smelling such a
 terrible stink, run a full mile towards
 Lenton, then stopt at a gate that goes in-
 to Lenton fields, just opposite to Wool-
 lerton-Hall, which is said to have as ma-
 ny windows in it as there are days in the
 year; but coming up to the bear they
 found him as dead as an herring, his
 head pluckt clear from his shoulders, but
 John rid strait away to Nottingham; up-
 on this the free-school-boys made these
 verses following,

*Anthony Topley that unluckie heir,
 Sold his land and bought a bear;
 He went to Nottingham to tan his skin,
 To make a bag to beg bread in.*

A merry Jest how he hunted the Squirril.

On a time he with several Gentlemen
 went to hunt the Squirrell, a rare sport

in our Countrey, and having a simple
fellow in their company, he promised the
fel ow the first Squirril they caught, but
did not, notwithstanding the fellow's clam-
or promise; the next Squirril they took
fell down at the feet of the dogs in a
cock glad seeming dead; John know-
ing their natures, took the Squirril by
the nose of the neck, gives her into the
hand of Martin, so; so was the fellow re-
med; the Squirril finding ease and li-
berty swallows the lower part of his
bane, that her teeth was; but Martin str-
iving to shake her off she stuck the faster,
till the smart force'd him to cry out with
vehemeny, I'le none of her, I'le none of
her, I'le none of her; after much wrath
and laughter they took the Squirril off.

Martin at that time deeply swore,
He ne're would hunt the Squirril more.

How he came to *London*, and cheared an
Upholster of a great sum.

after this he came to *London*, and lodg-
ed in the house of an Upholster in the sub-
urbs, pretending great dealings in the
Countrey for divers commodities, and so
bewitched himself, as none mis-trusted him
paying

paying iustly for every thing; not a boy
sent of an errant, but he gave him a good
reward; no linnen wash'd but he paid
nobly, never was seen to be disgrac'd in
drinke, his Landlady being a lusty, libely
young woman, beautiful and fair, so co-
lour his drink the better, he made much
of his Landlord; if he went to the Ale-
house or the Tavern he paid his Rick-
oning for him; he never went without
his pockets well lined with Gold and
Silver; but time emptied his pockets, and
now he must replenish, or of necessity
perish: There came a packet of Let-
ters to his hand from West-Chester, sig-
nifying that there was an hundred and
fifty pounds lay ready, if he would come
and receive the same, and withal to bring
down forty pounds worth of Goods
more, and receive all his monies toge-
ther: then shew'd he these Letters to
his Landlord, to confirm his belief, bor-
row'd forty pounds of him to buy these
Goods, perswades him to hire two hor-
ses to carry them both down, and travel-
ling to West-Chester, took up their Inn:
John enquires if such a Gentleman was
not yet come, naming a person of quality,
Answer was return'd he had not been
there yet, then he staid, saying, he pro-
mised

missed to meet me here about the time;
then bespake he a large Supper, saying,
that he expected some friends to sup with
him, calls for wine in abundance for the
Londoner; this done, he goes to the
Stable, hires a Boy to conduct him to
the sozenamed Gentlemans house, takes
both the horses with the Hostmantues a
mile out of the town, dismisses the boy,
and returns no more to the Upholster,
leaving him to buy another horse, and
look for his money.

How he left one horse and gained another.

The soztand in a skirmish between four
thieves, and six truen men, one of Friiths
Complices had his horse shot under him;
he sets his wits at work to get another,
and heard that a Parson whom he hated
was to ride eight miles to preach a Fun-
eral Sermon; caused his pretended ser-
vant to travel on foot to a convenient
place by the way-side: the Parson rid
upon a lusty grey Mare, and John upon
a black horse as black as Jet, and him-
self all in black from head to foot, with a
coal-black Periwig: his horse ran full
speed with all his vigour and strength to
overtake the Mare, and did so he slew the
Parson

Baron with his iron cross, that he almost killed him, and so falling from the beast, the Footman pretending pity, came and took the Mare away to keep her from danger; but the Baron loves not a stone-horse to this very day.

Set a Knave to catch a Knave.

It hapned that in a Countrey-town where John lay in the time of the wars, being then a Lieutenant, that he noted the passages between a young couple, and it was thus, an ancient rich Gentleman had married a very fair and beautiful young woman, which before had many suitors, one of the which, though he was a married man, did often frequent her company; and walking into the Orchard to solace themselves, free from all company, under a fair pear-tree, whose fruit was much coveted; It hapned that a School-boy went up in a Moon-shine night, to fill two Satchels with pears. After him came Frith, pretending so to steal pears, the boy fearing that he would beat him, supposing him to belong to the Orchard, hagg'd pardon, it was granted, and silence commended: immediately came this young Gallant and his young Gentle-

Gentlewoman just under the pear-tree, where the man thjete by his Border-hat, pulls out his purse of moneys, knife and keys, pulls off his coat, spreads it upon the ground to keep his Ladies clothes clean, lays her upon it, and to Venus sport they go with joy and great delight, this made Johns chap; water, and having no longer power to lozbear, with violence thjete down a Hatchel of pears upon them, then another, saying, then take the bags, the pears and all, then in all haste left taken out of the tree; but this couple supposing the devil to be there, ran with all speed away, leaving the hat, coat, knife, keys and moneys behind, next Sabbath John went to the Parish Church in that hat and coat, but the loser durd never own it.

Of a merry Jest at a Wakes.

It hapned that these four Gallants went to a Countrey-Wakes to be merry, where there was much dancing, and Spack; in the midst of this jollity he spied a young man sitting in a corner, with his hand upon o; in a young womans plackef, one of his Compllices call'd to him, demanding what sign to meet at next,
he

he replied with a loud voice, looking
them full in their faces, saying, At the
sign of the hand in Placker: At this the
Mouth removes his hand, Hold, hold,
(sa, s John) Friend, if you remove the
sign, we shall not know the house; this
caused much laughter through the whole
multitude of *Scholars*.

How he made Captain *Hinde* merry when
Melancholy.

HE fell out suddenly after that he came
to live with Captain James Hinde his
Master, who fell into a great Melancholy,
whereupon certain of the Society
carried both Master and Man into a *Re-
barn*, where was variety of Musick,
wine and good Cheer in abundance, yet
could not all this avail to make Hinde
once so to smile: but his man protested
ed, as he was a true man, an honest man,
and a Gentleman, if he could not make
his Master laugh, and so: his humor
of Melancholy, his Master should seek a
new man, and he for his own part would
seek a new Master within two days:
the Musicians went to dinner, John pri-
vately carried all their *Stool-cases* into

aback-room, and unloos'd a melody into every one of them: then he call'd for a lesson, that he no) nene never heard, but they could not answer his expectation: then he asked them to be diffin'd, and putting up their Instruments they depart: but before they went to the Strat-street, he call'd them again, saying, *I have it, I have it, Come, play it quickly, whilst it is in my minde, Play me, The Case is altered, or, All-true*; then they brought forth their Instruments, which was so foolishly bewrayed, that it caus'd Captain Hinde to laugh so heartily, and all the whole Company, that they were forc'd to hold him in his Chair: so John had fiftie pounds given him for his pains, for the quick curing of his Matter.

How he Cheated an Inn-keeper of fourty pounds.

The Merry conceited Mason travelled in the habit, and went by the name of a rich Countrey-Gazier, well known in London, and at such time as he knew he was not in London, came into an Inn, calls for Beer, drinks with the Inn-keeper: in comes one of his Complices in the habit of a Doyler, stands bare to him,

him, and is very observant; ~~and~~ by, How
 now, Ned, says he, what good News hast
 thou brought? how far are my cattel off?
 what time will they be here to night? Sir,
 says Ned, two of the biggest oxen, the
 brended and the black one are both fallen
 lame, and it is well if they get to London
 time enough for the next Market; then
 demanded he, if such a Friend of his were
 come to town, naming a rich Grazier. Ned
 said no, for some of his were fallen sick
 also, and he stayd to come along with the
 cattel; then he Rampt, protesting he must
 pay one hundred pounds the next day be-
 fore Sun-set upon bond, and as yet he had
 but fourscore; the Jan-keeper by their
 discourse thought he could not have less
 then four hundred pounds worth of cattel
 coming out of the countrey least him four-
 ty pounds; he promiss'd payment next
 day, but never came.

How he caught a silver Bird of great value

JOHN being in London in a gallant garb
 passing along, espied a silver Flagon
 standing on a Court-Capboard, a young
 Gentlewoman being at door, he pretend-
 ed his bird flew in, he gave him assist-
 ance, he thanked her, but the silver Flagon
 was never heard of.

How

why her husband sent such a one as he was
 for the moneys: naming himself by a great
 Gentlemans name that dwelt there, said,
 It was because he had more confidence in
 him then in any other, and that he had
 dealt with him for hundreds of pounds;
 then he shewed a Receipt, know you this,
 said he; Yes, very well said the good
 wile, and so delivered him an hundred
 pounds, but by the contrary ways, and
 left the Quayer to seea for money, but
 never came to that place any more.

How he and his two Complices robb'd a
 Gentleman and his Man of three hundred
 pounds, and repaid it again at that time.

HE and two of his Complices met a
 Gentleman and his man upon a
 plain, that had three hundred pounds in
 two Portmanteues, that they receiv'd for
 Rent, set upon them both, but the serving-
 man stood at a distance, beholding his
 Master fight valiantly, crying, Ah, well
 fought, Master; Ah, bravely fought, Master;
 but never came to help him; the Gentle-
 man being over-powered, yielded his mo-
 neys to save his life, saying, you see the
 cowardise of my man, pray challenge him

for

so; it: so I will, said one; riding up to-
wards him took away his Portmanteau,
then beats him with the flat side of his
sword, the man cried, You Rogue, do you
take away my money, and then beat me;
What, you think to serve me as you did
my Master, but I'll see you hang'd first;
then draws his sword, fought stoutly, the
rest standing amazed: the true man won.
Ded the I bless, so that he labored; then
thrust his sword into the flank of the
horse: then said the Gentleman, seeing
my Man will fight wee'll try our Fortunes
for our moneys: Mason sets upon the
Gentleman, the other upon his man, the
skirmish was maintained with courage
on both sides, that it was doubtful, but
his man cuts one of the Ghebes over the
pate, he tumbles, and was unable to
fight: then both sets upon the Mason, and
compelled him to return the moneys: the
Mason requested friendship, and so they
agreed not to discover them, carries the
wounded man behind the Gentle-
mans Man to an Inn, where they set up
their horses: had their women dress, stay
together, and in the evening broke fast
together, swore secrecy to each other with
promise not to discover them, and the

Gentleman never to be rob'd, ride what road he will, using only a by-word.

How they rob'd a man of two hundred pounds, and paid it again at six months.

Three of these Blazes, meeting with a Londoner with two hundred pounds which he went to pay upon bond for stuffe he had received at London, they carried him to a By-house, where they refreshed themselves; the Sun growing low, the Londoner call'd for a reckoning, but the Mason told him he must pay all the money he had, if it were five hundred pounds: he seeing no remedy, said, I hope you are Gentlemen, you will save my life: Wee, said Frith, but see that you do not discover us, so they set him on his horse, conducted him to the road, and so dismiss'd him.

How at six months end they were discovered

About six months after, the Tradesman walking the streets espied three horses, at a Tavern-door: well-knowing them, to belong to the Robbers, he takes out a writ, emploies two Marshals-men to arrest them: besides a Justices Warrant with a Constable and Aid if need required: then he first attacks their horses, sets

a Watch over them, plants his Marshals-men in one Room, the Constable and Aid in another, orders them to call for what Wine they like best, and he would pay for all, then goes he in his own person unto these Gentlemen, presents them with a gallon of the best Sack, drinks a merry Cup to them all, gives them many thanks for their last kindness, they stiffly deny that ever they saw him before, saying, Come let us be gone, and let us know what is to pay; Gentlemen said the Tradesman, I can tell you; how can you tell, said they; Very well, saith he, for you must pay me two hundred pounds that I lent you in such a place, they utterly denied it; but he shewed them he had seized their houses: and there sits Marshals-men to Arrest you, or if you please, there sits the Constable with a warrant and a guard to carry you before the next Justice: As you was civil to me so will I be to you, either pay the moneys, or chuse which of the other pleaseth you best, but they finding no other remedie, paid him all his moneys and charges, and gave him a large Colatior, gain'd promise not to discover them, and he never to be reb'd, and so part as very good friends.

How

*How they rob'd a Rich man in the North,
and came to London, and Acquitted
themselves of the Fact.*

THERE was a Man who dwelt in the
North of England, who never marri-
ed, nor could endure a woman, no not his
own Sister; he was exceeding rich, ha-
ving Chests full of monies, and kept
but a small family; To his house fide
of these resorts, and being troubled in their
minds that so much treasure should be
hid from the world, contrived how it
might be disposed of for the good of ma-
ny, to do this, one gains acquaintance
with the Serving-man, and oft repairs to
the house in his Masters absence: the
Master some time after being abroad, he
carried his man to the wine, and made
him drunk; leads him home, lays him up-
on the bed, immediately comes the other
After, takes their Instruments, opens
the locker, fills all their Portmantues,
locks up the outer door, having first
bound the drunken man upon his bed,
then came with all speed for London,
where it was agreed, that one should put
the rest in prison, it being but a little be-
fore the Sessions, the mercy conceived
Malon apprehends them, accuses them

of

of suspicion of Felony before the Justice, that they had robb'd him and a Post-Comptrey Gentleman of several sums of money, but there was no Will found, and they were guilt by Proclamation.

A Merry Jest of a Trunk worth 600 l.

These merry conceited Fellows lying in an Inn, underscored by the Chamberlains words there was such a trunk of moneys and plate: they determined the same into their Postmantua, or convey it out, no notice was taken: but when these Blades were in their beds, the Inn-keeper having been deceived before, brought in another trunk just like the real trunk, and conveyed the real trunk into a safer place, giving notice to the Chamberlains not to mind it, they seeing an opportunity, conveyed away the trunk to an house that was privy to their Designs, supposing it by the weight to be the real, but opening the same, found it stuff'd with bags of Straws, byss-bats, and such stuff, and so for garmish they found a large pair of Rams-horns, together with a Rope and butter, at which they were all amazed, knowing it pretended their being hang'd.

How

How they committed a notable Robbery, and the Merry conceited Mason was taken, imprisoned, and how he escap'd.

These Gallants having had but bad success in the last Enterprize, resolv'd upon a more sure Purchase; They all went to a Gentlemans house, alights, tells the Porter they had earnest business, and must speak with his Master immediately, they had admittance, leaving one to look to their horses, having their Pistols cockt and hand upon sword, promising to hurt no creature, commanding the Gentleman up-stairs, half of them attending him, and took away 500 l.

How he was taken and Escap'd.

A short time after, being committed to prison for a great crime, and so like to suffer, the Assizes being near, where some of his Complices came to see him, invited him to drink, the Cellar being without the prison, his friends takes their leave, he seeth two horses bridled and saddled, gets upon one of them, and so went over into Ireland.

F I N I S.